

L E T T E R

F R O M A

GENTLEMAN in EAST-LOTHIAN,

T O H I S

F R I E N D in T O W N,

O N T H E S U B J E C T O F

M I L I T I A

E D I N B U R G H,

P R I N T E D B Y G. M A R T I N & J. W O T H E R S P O O N,

M D C C L X I I

LETTER

1894

TO THE HONORABLE

MEMBER

OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

IN SENATE

WASHINGTON

DECEMBER

1894

1894

L E T T E R

ON THE SUBJECT OF

M I L I T I A.

S I R,

I HAVE read all the letters that have lately appeared in the papers on the subject of MILITIA; and yet, partly from indolence, and partly from despair, I resolved to give myself no trouble about the matter, till I read *the Letter from a country-gentleman to his neighbour*, as it is entituled, in *the Courant of February 10th*. That letter, I confess, has had the effect of *an inflammatory address to my passions*, and has awakened in my breast that *national pride which, he says, has been the curse of this country*.

The first impulse of that public passion, I own, would lead me to treat with neglect so false and inconsistent a composition; but as the boldness of the writer's assertions, and the plausible style in which he has conveyed his sentiments, may possibly impose upon some well-meaning people, I shall examine his letter with some attention.

I shall not defend the sentiments, and much less the style of the first letter-writer, nor engage in criticism with this nice and accurate country-gentleman. Carelessness or absurdity of expression are not the faults I find with him: baseness of mind, or absurdity of thought, are his errors; errors to which an imagination heated with great objects is not incident. His very first paragraph, in which he has displayed his talent for fine writing, is a proof of both: for there he complains of the author of the first letter, *for reviving odious distinctions, which the Legislature of Great Britain has, ever since the Union, taken so much pains to put an end to*; whereas that writer justly complains that the Parliaments have not of late followed their old course, and pursued every possible method of putting an end to *odious distinctions*; but have (unawares perhaps) created a new one, by refusing us the important and valuable privilege of arms, which they have given to the English. Such is the head of this self-conceited writer: and as for the baseness of his mind, no stronger proof need be given than what arises from this very passage, in which he treats the former author so severely

for reviving odious distinctions; and yet, in the conclusion of his performance, revives the most odious distinction of all, with a virulence and malice that no Scotman ever discovered before.

His next paragraph is calculated not only to shew, that an hyperbolical description is not literally true, but likewise, that this country is not in such a depopulated state, as to need the establishment of a Militia to repopulate the country. In this respect he differs widely from former writers against a Militia: and such a well informed and able country-gentleman may be allowed to differ from others, provided he does not differ from himself. But when, in the same period, he represents the country both as depopulated and not depopulated, both as rich and poor, what regard is to be paid to him? If we look into the churches or markets, says he, we shall see whether our country appears to be in a depopulated state; but if we observe the scarcity of men-servants, and the high rate of wages—What then? why, it would be a gross mistake to resolve this entirely into the numbers gone abroad. It shall not be entirely resolved into that. But if men-servants are scarce, and wages high, is it not true that we want people? O! but, answers this sagacious adept in political arithmetic, the scarcity of women-servants is great too! Men-servants are scarce and dear; but women-servants are scarce and dear too. No regiments of women (or Amazons, as he calls them, to shew his reading,) have been raised; therefore the scarcity of men-servants does not arise from this cause, that regiments of men have been raised. I protest, this ingenious reasoner has almost persuaded me, that what I took for an hyperbole, in the first letter from the country, is literally true; and that the advanced rate of the womens wages is owing to their being employed in place of the men that are absent.

In the same manner he calls us poor and rich in a breath; poor in comparison of rich nations, and rich in comparison of poor nations; which is a very important discovery! But he should learn to think of populousness in a relative sense too; and to perceive, that the complaint of scarcity of hands does not absolutely mean that there are few hands, but only that there are few hands compared with the necessary work.

He concludes this great paragraph by saying, *And did we carefully pursue the measures pointed out to us by the British Parliament, we should soon become rich and powerful, and rise above every species of contempt.* I do not know what measures he means, except it be the Union, which he mentions in the beginning of the sentence: and, if it is that, let him take notice, That it is in the careful pursuit of the principles of that happy measure, to obtain a full and equitable observation of that great covenant, and to render it complete, that the present scheme of a new application to parliament for a Scots Militia is undertaken. But we must be rich and powerful,

powerful, says he, to rise above every species of contempt. So that in this passage, it would seem, he admits that we, at present, lie under some species of contempt; though downwards, in his letter, he takes a great deal of pains to shew, that we are not objects of that passion. According to him, riches are power and honour, and poverty is weakness and disgrace. I cannot tell what time it may take the nation to become rich; but I dare say our author thinks he has found out a short road to become rich and powerful himself; and, I fancy, he does not much care what species of contempt shall follow.

In his next paragraph, which is a long one, our author affects to be ignorant of the most common figures of speech, and abuses the first letter-writer, for *daring to presume to pervert the intention of an act of parliament, and clothing it with expressions equally invidious and false*. One would imagine, from this passage, that the author was in reality a right simple country-gentleman, who knew nothing about acts of parliament, and believed, that the Legislature had, in express terms, declared something or other with relation to a Scots Militia, though they did not *clothe their act with false or invidious expressions*. No, no; this affected ignorance will never do. Our author seems to know the legal well paved high-road to riches and power too well to pass for a simpleton: he knows too well how to flatter the prejudices of some great men, by abusing his country, to be a man altogether unskilled in the nature of acts of parliament, and the manifold senses which they will admit of.

He next proceeds to enumerate the great advantages that have arisen from the Treaty of Union, which every man of common sense admits of in their full extent. But I fancy he will find very few, who, like him, will hold them as favours for which we ought to be grateful to England, or consider them as distinctions, established, *ex gratia*, merely for our behoof. But he, thankful man that he is! takes every thing by the lump, express stipulations at the Union, regulations of police, laws favourable to trade or manufacture, made since we were one nation, the extension of the prerogative of the crown, and the abolition of feudal jurisdictions; and offers altogether, what has been given, and what has been taken, what we have got, and what we have not got, as a thank-offering at the shrine of the God whom he adores. According to him, one should think, we owed gratitude to the English for observing the articles of the Union, and are very much obliged to them for not treating us like a conquered province.

We said, by our former application to that generous people, and, I hope, we shall say it again, "We give up our sovereignty and independence to be made one with you; let us, in all respects, be treated on a footing of equality. We are so sensible of the advantages derived

derived from the Union, that we are jealous of any departure from the principles of it. We are now a part of your great commonwealth, we are members of your body; you have cherished us with care, and it was no more than your duty and your interest to do so. You have made us partakers, in many respects, of your wise and just policy; do not destroy the praise of your justice, by a single act of injustice. You have unfettered, you have clothed your legs and your feet; put arms of defence upon them too, as well as upon your head and your breast; then will they be safe, and your whole body invulnerable."

After having taken a great deal of pains to shew, that we are not the objects of the contempt of the English in other respects, he comes directly to the Militia; and petulently asks, *If there be any indignity in refusing us the same method of defence they have taken to themselves? and then calls upon his country to lay aside its national pride.* A very hopeful son she has of him truly! O but, says he, *there can be no indignity in not trusting us with arms, because that would take six or seven thousand hands from our infant agriculture and manufactures.* Not a word of the hands that are taken for life into the army. One would think our author had read *Sister Peg* as a serious history, and drawn his ideas of policy from that merry performance. We are told there, indeed, that Bumbo, in his great speech, commended M'Lurchar extremely, and said it was pity to take him off his loom, except he was to be transported. But no body could have expected the same ludicrous

though in a grave temper, from a country gentleman. He goes on to convince us that there can be no indignity in not trusting us with arms, for another reason; that is, because we are fond of them. Here he seems to have a very deep design: for having flattered the English sufficiently already, I think he intends, in this place, to intimidate that nation. One would imagine, indeed, that to make this menace formidable, he would have supposed the rotation fully to have taken place among the Scots; and when once the whole of this proud passionate people were bred to arms, he might have insinuated that nobody could foresee what might happen. But that did not suit with his next paragraph about idleness; and therefore he supposes that the remaining Scots, after the Militia are established, (who may be about 150,000 fighting men), whom he just now represented as so desperately warlike, and so fond of the martial achievements of their ancestors, will be grown perfectly tame and pacific at the end of three years, and quietly yield their turn to shine in arms to the men already in possession of them. He is a very cowardly country-gentleman this, who thinks six thousand Militia will conquer both England and Scotland!

I shall not follow him through his next argument, by which he would prove the kind partiality of the British Parliament, in not

not *saddling us with a Militia*, (as he elegantly expresses it), viz. *that it could not have answered the purposes of a national defence*. For though, with his usual consistency, he diminishes the heroes of his former article to nothing in this; yet his argument, upon the whole, is but *trite*, and has little of his characteristical ingenuity in it; and therefore I shall not lengthen my letter by giving it an answer.

In his next argument, however, he follows no beaten path; and I will strain myself much but I shall find an answer to that. It is the great opposition the Militia met with in England. Pray observe the peculiar clearness and force of it, taken in connexion with what goes before. The Parliament *saddled* the English with a Militia, because they were averse to it: they did not *saddle* the Scots with it, because they were desirous of it, (a very kind parliament truly!) There was great opposition in England, where they did not like that law: what is the conclusion? Let us oppose it in Scotland, because we do like it! This is the natural conclusion. He gives it a turn, indeed, by expressing himself thus, *Shall we wantonly wish to bring upon ourselves a burden?* But here he gives us the slip; for though he tells us truly that there were oppositions and obstructions, he omits to tell what there is now, and conceals the following important fact, "That the commons have gone through the new Militia Bill for England, which amends the former acts, and reduces all of them into one."

~~Country~~ ~~was not~~ ~~reasoned in the manner~~ ~~from the history of~~ ~~that law,~~ "That although many of the English, at first from mistaken notions, or from effeminacy contracted behind the counter or on the loom, opposed that salutary law, and obstructed the execution of it; yet time and experience had enlarged their views, invigorated their minds, furnished satisfying answers to every objection, and made them at last unanimous in the pursuit of that manly and constitutional measure."

He concludes this paragraph, not with an argument, but with a figure; and a bold one it is! To give it still more energy, he has thrown it into the form of an interrogation. *Shall we, like the Cappadocians, run back to slavery?* I must interrogate in my turn. Was it ignorance or cunning that made him press the Cappadocians into his service? did he seize them in hopes of being the first occupant, which would give him a right to the possession? I shall not endeavour to wrest them from him: but this much I will say, in excuse for the poor Cappadocians, That as their liberty was offered them by the Romans, who retained to themselves the power of the sword, by which alone liberty can be preserved, they might have very properly said, *Timeo Danaos*

et dona ferentes; or, in the terms of an old proverb, *the man who boasteth of a false gift, is like clouds and wind without rain.*

The last paragraph of this worthy country-gentleman's, for the sake of which I apprehend all the rest was written, is a finishing stroke indeed; and fully proves that his *head*, which I have endeavoured to dissect, is fitly matched with a *heart*. Yet such is the singularity of this writer, that even in this passage, where he speaks so plainly in other respects, he cannot avoid sophistry and false reasoning. Because *the English have given a negative to a Scots Militia, from a persuasion that our people are Jacobites; therefore this nation, which it cannot be denied, says he, in general is well affected to the present royal family, ought, from the same persuasion that our people are Jacobites, to be thankful that they have not obtained a Militia.*

He has the impudence too, to say, That all the wellwishers to a Scots Militia are *but dissembled friends to their king and constitution.* How dare such a miscreant profane the sacred names of the king and constitution? After the prudent and successful measures which the government have followed to destroy all distinctions, after the well-placed confidence which the late and the present king have put in the Highlanders themselves, which has killed the very root of disaffection in this country, it is impossible for me to treat with temper this audacious man, who would countenance, if he could, so vile and just a policy. Happily for me, ~~the throne is now occupied by a more judicious monarch.~~

In this expectation, (says our gracious sovereign in the last sentence of that memorable, that endearing speech), I am the more encouraged by a pleasing circumstance, which I look upon as one of the most auspicious omens of my reign; that happy extinction of divisions, and that union and good harmony which continue to prevail among my subjects, afford me the most agreeable prospect. The natural disposition and wishes of my heart are to cement and promote them: and I promise myself that nothing will arise, on your part, to interrupt or disturb a situation so essential to the true and lasting felicity of this great people. I am,

S I R,

East Lothian,

Feb. 15th, 1762.

Your most humble Servant,